

Abstract

The Australian National University
Institute of the Arts

PHOTOGRAPHY AND MEMORY: research into the expression of
personal narratives using still photography. The work explores the
relationship between biographical photographs and memory and
the narrative potential of sequence and juxtaposition of images. An
exhibition of photographs exhibited at the Canberra School of Art
Gallery from March 9 to 19, 2000 comprised the outcome of the
course. The nature of the course of study
undertaken is documented.



Canberra School of Art

MASTER OF ARTS (VISUAL ARTS)
2000

Marzena Wasikowska

REPORT

PRESENTED IN FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE
MASTER OF ARTS (VISUAL ARTS)

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Acknowledgements

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the following people.

In Australia:

Martin Jolly, my Supervisor, for his understanding and support of my visual ideas and my particular methodology.

Anne Brennan, my Coursework Coordinator, for her enthusiastic advice and pertinent anecdotes.

Nigel Lendon, Postgraduate Studies Coordinator, who provided timely academic feedback and in various other ways bolstered my professional confidence.

John Mills, the ever obliging IT superman, for saving my digital life. Staff and students of the Photomedia workshop.

My children Jess, Mia and Kai, my tireless models, for anticipating my intentions and for contributing so much of their own sensibilities to the photographs.

My mother, Natalia Broadhurst, for keeping the family soul and spirit together, at least 3 days a week for the last 3 years.

Friends and models: Dan Scollay, Szymon Szewczyk, Laura Boynas, Amy Reece, Wally Truesdale and Steve Payne.

Margaret Ziolkowski for her critical eye and Polish sense of humour.

In Poland:

Jan Szewczyk, painter and sculptor, for his warm helpful spirit and ingenuity in organising exhibitions and contexts of short notices.

Krzyszna Leczywek, photographer and curator, for the enthusiasm she showed towards my work and her introduction to the Polish Art Photographers Association.

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Introduction

1

Slawomir Preis, Director of the Museum in Stargard Szczecinski, and his assistant, Aneta Piepszak, for the opportunity to exhibit in their gallery.

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On a personal note:

A special thank you to John Reid for being there, his love of debate and always having an insightful opinion about my work; and to his brother, Peter Reid, whose posthumous legacy enabled my family to travel to Poland.



My mother, Natalia Broadhurst
Photographed in Szczecin, 1970.



Marzena Wasikowska
Photographed in Szczecin, 1968.



My father, Mieczysław Wasikowski
Photographed in Szczecin, 1961



My association with the Canberra School of Art began in 1981. The concerns of my MA VA had their beginnings when I commenced my studies as an undergraduate. In terms of my current preoccupation - the connection between photography and memory, with portraiture and photographic documentation of my children - there is a special significance in recalling my first day at Art School.

Roland Barthes would be delighted to know that there is no photograph of the occasion to interfere with my memory of it. I can recall the details and the emotional overtones of that important day in my life, very clearly. As I approached the School, the blinding sunlight reflected from the white walls. I protected my camera and a pocket full of film from the glare and heat with the shadow of a large folio case slung over my shoulder. I can reveal to you what no photograph of that moment could. My folio contained only my lunch - an apple and tuna sandwich, a wedge of blue vein cheese, a bunch of black grapes. That was my only baggage. I had deliberately left my college photographic prints at home. This work I wanted to forget. It consisted mainly of photographs of children.

Another significant moment - a memory-narrative - that has escaped documentation was the presentation to me of a black cardboard box by my cousin, Robert. He made quite a ceremony out of it. He had arrived in Canberra from Poland in 1987, 13 years after my arrival here. The box contained our family archive of small black and white photographs. Looking at them provided my first actual experience of what I've since read about - photographs not only aid memory but actually configure it. I was shocked to realise that the mental images that I had held of some events and of my Polish family were actually memories of specific photographs from the family album. Although I don't remember, my mother assures



me that I had pored over it as a child in Poland. These photographs were now the contents of Robert's camera obscura. Barthes recounts an interesting experience in *Camera Lucida*.¹ The implications were similar. This challenge to my memory intensified my resolve to return to Poland - to recharge my mind with actual experience of the people and place of my childhood. I finally returned to Poland in August, 1998. I was there for seven months and exposed more than 4000 colour and black and white negatives of family, friends and special places.

Catherine Keenan in her article, *On the Relationship between Personal Photographs and Individual Memory*, challenges Barthes' assertion and that of his conceptual predecessor in this respect, Siegfried Kracauer, that photographs are essentially 'counter-memory'. I empathise with her proposition that:-

"photographs can only ever be memory-images ... and although such images are the basic currency of memory they are not, on their own, enough. Memory proper is the present weaving of these images into meaningful narratives that explain how the past is connected to the present, and without this narrative support the image cannot even be a memory-image."ⁱⁱ

Now, in February 2000, during the writing of this Report and in preparation for my folio exhibition, I am creating stories with my photographs on the walls of the Photomedia Workshop. These are

Photograph: Holiday in Swiradowicz Zdroj with my mother in March, 1966. A friend, Malgosia, stands outside the dwarfs' house.

Photograph: Mergans in the main street of Szczecin, 1969.



stories of my return to Poland that I wish to reveal and I have selected images from the reservoir of visual material I gathered. Other juxtapositions - part chance, part subconscious - offer narratives that speak to me for the very first time. The opportunity to contemplate and savour the moment long after the event is the bonus in taking photographs.

When photographs are brought together, the temporal difference between the moments that they record creates a space. It's a conceptual space under their influence; and to varying degrees, there is room for remembering personal significances, for the construction of fictions, for flights of imagination. My MA VA culminates with the exhibition of this work.

The location for this warming-up period was my favourite stretch of landscape, Grouse Lake, on the South Coast of NSW. I made a photo of my son, Kai on the beach. Max Dupain's image

Notes:
i Barthes, Roland., Camera Lucida Reflections on Photography, Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1982, London.

ii Keenan, Catherine., "On the Relationship between Personal Photographs and Individual Memory", History of Photography, Volume 22, Number 1, Spring 1998.

I also squeezed in my first photographically oriented field trip. It was to Lake Mungo, NSW. I used transparency film to document the children in a bush setting. I also took 'straight' landscapes - bush scenes, textured trees. The most sustained idea concentrated on foreground close-ups of (beautiful) flowering weeds on the edge of the open bush. The view of the horizon was of course NSW. There was a

Photograph: Marzena in the main street of Szczecin, 1969.



There was a "temporal difference" between my acceptance into the MA VA and the commencement of the course. I wanted to start the course with a file full of recent images. I filled this three month gap with an intensive period of film exposure dealing with all the themes that had emerged in the preceding period of child raising and domesticity. The themes were basically autobiographical in nature but could be grouped under the following headings: motherhood / family life and the spectrum of emotions that surface within it; the sexuality of my children; child role-playing; and the documentation of the mundane happenings in one's daily life with the hope of capturing the exceptional image with universal appeal - succinct poignant, not stereotypical.

The location for this warming-up period was my favourite stretch of landscape, Brou Lake, on the South Coast of NSW. I made photographs of my son, Kai on the beach. Max Dupain's image came to mind. Kai is lying on his body board on the sand. There is a contemporary twist. A one litre pump pack of sun screen is off to his side - the bronzed Aussie no longer an icon in our times. Skin cancer statistics are too high. I became excited about the possibility of reworking popular images in a contemporary setting but dismissed the idea. I did not want to add to "the immense glut of images (which) so informs a collective imagination that originality is often lost in the sustained connection of endless reproductions."ⁱ

I also squeezed in my first photographically orientated field trip. It was to Lake Mungo, NSW. I used transparency film to document the children in a bush setting. I also took 'straight' landscapes - bush scenes, tortured trees. The most sustained idea concentrated on foreground close-ups of (beautiful) flowering weeds on the edge of the road through the vast spaces of central NSW. There was a



sense of conveying a journey's momentum by recording the stops. In the final analysis (this took place in semester 2, 1997), the work refused to come together as a sequence - no drama, no suspense and a weak narrative which basically summed up the trip itself. It served, however, as the first trial for the planned return to Poland which was still in the planning stage. When I started my MA VA the trip to Poland had not been finalised. (I had no way of financing this international expedition nor had I established professional contacts there). The expectation of travelling to Poland was eventually confirmed in May of 1998 after I had made contact with Art Schools in several Polish cities and my relatives in Szczecin and had organised accommodation for our group of five. By then I had also refined a working methodology.

The concepts and contexts informing my MA VA work are accounted for in this Report under the titles by which the work was assembled as a folio or for exhibition.

The Winter Garden photographs

"Photographs state the innocence, the vulnerability of lives heading toward their own destruction and this link between photography and death haunts all people". Susan Sontag, *On Photography*,ⁱⁱ

The Winter Garden photographs began when I organised photographic sessions with my children and their friends during long winter evenings indoors. It inspired great and frenzied activity in the children - dress-ups, acting-up in the bath and in their rooms before bed. Eventually their boundless energy would overwhelm me and I would often take my camera and flash equipment into the garden to



take photographs there, while they were still 'yahooing' around inside.

The garden was cold and lifeless - a deathly space encompassing the lively ambience of the house. I conjured up images that could stand as metaphor for the gulf of emotional experience between the two places. How can objects, which are regarded as harmless during the day, such as the rope upon which the children swing, seem so threatening in the low light at night? I noted partly in answer to this question in my journal:

"I was struck by the austerity and mystery of my garden after the first winter rain, all the while being aware of the life and activities going on inside the house. One of those activities that deeply affected me was watching the video of the New Zealand film, 'Once Were Warriors'. In the film, a young adolescent girl hanged herself in the garden while her family and friends sang songs and partied inside the house. It was her response to being raped by a close friend of her parents the night before."

I continued this thread of the nocturnal outdoors at Brou Lake. Its crumbling and skeletal Casuarina trees visually integrated well with the back garden images.

Inevitably I would return from the back garden to the warmth and intimacy of the bedrooms and lie with my children until they fell asleep. We would discuss the good and bad moments of the day, and I would answer dozens of questions that did not come to their minds until these tender moments after dark. (How, in the safety of one's own bed, can one bring to mind such scary thoughts, bad dreams and worries?) I would listen to the deep, slow breathing that



distinguishes sleep and dreaming from consciousness and thought. I wondered, what distinguishes a photograph of sleep from one of death?

In contrast to how these evenings began, I would quietly move about the bedroom and photograph the children again as they lay still and silent - unconscious of the clack of the shutter and the flash of intense light. Why didn't a nineteenth century parent commission a photograph of their sleeping child?

The main problem I encountered with these casual photographs of the children asleep was the loss of control over the staging of the image. I began requesting that they wear particular clothing to bed, and I had to stop myself from re-positioning their sleeping bodies. When Jess, Mia and Kai saw these first attempts they were, in the main, amused and unconcerned by my nocturnal activities and their lack of participation. Their trust was implicit.

The next step was to get the children's conscious cooperation and greater sense of involvement that drew on their relationship with me as their mother. I set up my bed area much like a stage set (experimenting with emotional impact of colour, I chose and bought some red bed sheets) while my actors engaged in a drama of their choice. It was in this context that the naked portraits emerged in all their sensual innocence. It was in the detached environment of the commercial photographic laboratory and the gallery that an understandable questioning occurred. Two of the portraits were rejected by two successive professional printing labs and were late for mounting in the first Photospace exhibition of The Winter Garden. A note was pinned to the gallery wall explaining the absence of the portraits. It read in part:



"There is a particular concern to represent the innocence of childhood in this body of work. It is a task that is made more difficult when undertaken in a society currently engaged in exposing the extent of its perversity toward children (paedophilia, stolen generation, domestic violence). It is under these circumstances that statements that address innocence as something worth appreciating and preserving need to be made."

Innocence is a gift that the young can perpetually offer back to the generation that preceded them. In many ways these pictures come from my children. They are proud of them."

The shift from private to public viewing was something of a challenge to my innocence and prompted much defensive articulation of the relationship I have with my children. Some people read these photographs in terms of pornography and paedophilia. In this context they became problematic images to resolve. Child pornography and paedophilia are topical and contentious issues. Without having much control over the matter, I had to consider this work in relation to it.

It is an extension of my mothering that my children relate to me and my camera in the way that is revealed in this work. The fact that such images may be sexually arousing for some people, and as a consequence judged exploitative without reservation, should not be upheld to censor the expression of my reality. (No one had actually confessed to me that they found the work arousing but they were concerned lest someone else might.) The extension of this fear is that it turns the world into the very "penitentiary" that Norman Lindsay had in mind in *Prunster, U*, *The Legendary Lindsay*. Beagle Press and the Art Gallery of NSW, Sydney, 1995, on wowsers -



moralists:

"... an ineffably pious person who mistakes the world for a penitentiary and himself for a warder."

I considered the arguments of political correctness in relation to the truthfulness to my experiences of parenting. I have been an interested observer of the sensuality displayed by my three children. Mothering is a most sensuous experience. I wanted to portray an intimate interior space. The red bed sheets and ambient light responded to the bodies with aesthetic definition. The colour, the tone, the formal elegance, were all directed/employed to producing an aesthetic response in the viewer. The colour red is loaded with the appropriate psychological references for this work. Appropriate, in terms of warmth, not in terms of sexual reference.

The photographs in Photospace and Disclosure, at the Australian Centre of Photography, were pinned to the wall. It is possible that the reading of the images was affected by this presentation. In Poland, these same photographs were framed and the response was much more moderate, the images were located more in the context of art history. The Panel of nine members of The Fellowship of Polish Art Photographers before whom I showed my work for admission into the association, asked for my reading of the work and were satisfied with a short explanation. Their response was that this was "true art in the vision of Botticelli".

The experience of the commercial laboratory rejections and the Photospace exhibition, highlighted to me the importance of artist intent in reading visual images - in much the same way as 'intent' distinguishes the difference between a charge of murder and one of



manslaughter in the British justice system. When intent is not clear in an artwork, it has to be determined by the viewer indirectly. This can be done from an examination of the wider context of the artist's practice, from debate and from the testament of others. I appreciated the remarks made by Anne Brennan at the opening of the Photospace exhibition of this work:

"The transactions between mother and child, the intimacy which allows the relationship is not unlike that of lovers. ... The way in which children try things on, act out, revel in every conceivable stereotype which the adult world offers them. These are difficult things to talk about in the context of the moral panic in the community about paedophilia."ⁱⁱⁱ

Because of similar subject matter and similar controversy, some people have related my photographs to Sally Mann's work. She is also privileged as mother/photographer and she actively, at times, organises and directs her children but with a different end in mind. I read her work in terms of beautiful documents of her children.

As a matter of intent, I feel my photographs need to be more multi-layered in the final edit, than Sally Mann's. I want to see my presence implied in my photographs. To serve as documents; and, to be able to convey an autobiographical reference located very much in the present in the final compilation of narrative sequences.

In addition to drawing inspiration from my personal experiences of life, influences surfaced from other sources during these experiential art-making rituals with my children. Principally, they were thoughts associated with reading for art theory units about von Gloeden's



and Mapplethorpe's treatment of sexuality; the writings of Roland Barthes and the many critical articles generated by them.

Library research focused on accounts of the *ars moriendi* practices in the nineteenth century involving postmortem photography; on Sally Mann's photography of her children; and on Jock Sturges' photographs of nudists on a particular French beach. The viewing of *Body*, an exhibition curated by Tony Bond at the Art Gallery of NSW, was also very instructive.

I read three autobiographies, Ewa Hoffman, *Lost in Translation*, Drusilla Mojean, *Stages*, and David Malouf, *12 Conversations Street* in order to re-acquaint / ing my own memories of my childhood in view of my impending visit to Poland.

"Autobiographical reading has become for me a desire for dialogue."⁴⁹





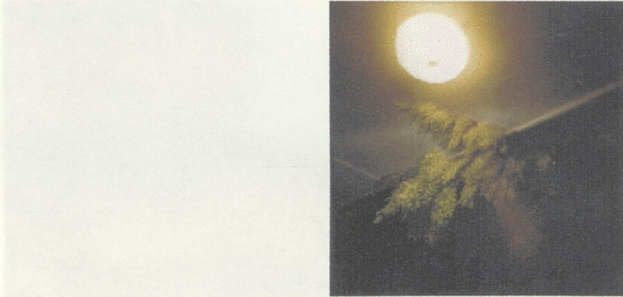
I proposed to initiate my image production for Semester 1, 1998, with a broad ranging survey of subject matter. This was to generate new possibilities and directions. I intended to invoke this strategy when in Poland and I wanted to test a working method, focusing on the post-production treatment of images. The disparate array of subject matter, sets and combinations of images was to be compiled, evaluated for meanings and explored for unexpected visual relationships. From these juxtapositions, I expected various thought associations or narratives to emerge. I wanted to trial the presentation of these experiments by way of a pin-up in Photospace. If this strategy proved successful, I would take the core of a show to Poland and follow a similar procedure while working there.

I read three autobiographies, Ewa Hoffman, Lost in Translation, Drusila Mojeska, Poppy, and David Malouf, 12 Edmondstone Street in order to re-acquaint / jog my own memories of my childhood in view of my impending visit to Poland.

"Autobiographical reading has become for me a desire for dialogue."^{iv}

These readings combined with the new images led me to consider the role photography plays in memory as a major theme to be explored in Poland. Is it possible to make a hard copy of one's memory, to take into account one's own history and the notion that everything is connected - personal failures, vulnerabilities, tacit agreements, allegiances, unwanted desires? How does one depict one's own history - photograph an idea rather than the object?

Another interesting development that emerged for research was the way photographs have a dialogue when placed next to each other,

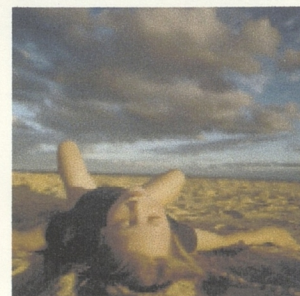


such as with images on facing pages in a book. The narrative intensifies when the images brought together are themselves from broader disparate contexts - the spectrum of interpretations widens.

Various devices were explored in the assembling of narrative sequences such as: (i) relationships in terms of visual structure to allow the eye to scan (ii) cinematic references to extend the temporal dimension of each image and (iii) introducing discord in the visual flow to signal a change in scene, time, mood or pace.

The series explored the depiction of atmosphere as the primary concern. Narrative potential was secondary to it.

I devoted a lot of time to finding institutions of Visual Art in Poland, ascertaining which ones offered courses in photography and what was the standard of their facilities. The reason for this enquiry was to gain access to facilities while I was in Poland in order to be able to do as much work as possible. I received a letter from the Centre of Artistic Research at the Poznan School of Fine Art, offering me a working position as well as access to darkroom facilities for that academic year 1999. Unfortunately the conditions of my proposed stay did not seem to be acceptable for the Poznan authorities and I





This series of work is distinguishable from the preceding Brou Lake Series by a complete change of mood, colour, and tone.

After reading the book, Imaginary Life by David Malouf, I was interested in picturing some of the images that came to my mind. Brou Lake Series II are the images that emerged. (Brou Lake Series I sunshine had changed to rain). With this second series, the 'mood' is close to that which I interpreted from Malouf's text. This series explored the depiction of atmosphere as the primary concern. Narrative potential was secondary to it.

I devoted a lot of time to finding institutions of Visual Art in Poland, ascertaining which ones offered courses in photography and what was the standard of their facilities. The reason for this enquiry was to gain access to facilities while I was in Poland in order for the trip to be as productive as possible. I received a letter from the Dean of Artistic Research at the Poznan School of Fine Art, offering me a teaching position as well as access to darkroom facilities for their academic year 98/99. Unfortunately the conditions of engagement at the CSA were not favourable for the Poznan exchanging lecturer and he withdrew. I visited the Art School in Poznan in January to clarify misunderstandings and revive exchange possibilities.

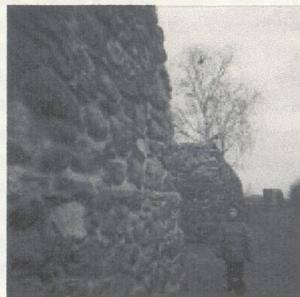


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Overtones - From a Journey to Poland

Overtones - From a Journey to Poland ... and places - revealed in *Polonia*. My journey to this country, the first time in 24 years, was a response to a restlessness arising from persistent memories of cultural displacement as a child. It is the source of inspiration for the work.

My mother migrated from Poland in secrecy in 1974 when I was 12 years of age. My father (divorced from my mother when I was three) was told we were visiting Austria. I thought we were going on holiday. We boarded a cargo ship. Mother worked like a dogging cat to do, in New Zealand, and then Australia for 5 years. I arrived with pocketed with two mar in Australia. They drove to Canberra & they married. She said it was all over. My next job was to be a nurse. I was in the army and I was a nurse. I was in the army and I was a nurse. I was in the army and I was a nurse.





This recent work relates to specific people and places I revisited in Poland. My journey to this country, the first time in 24 years, was a response to a restlessness arising from persistent memories of cultural displacement as a child. It is the source of inspiration for the work.

My mother migrated from Poland in secrecy in 1974 when I was 12 years of age. My father (divorced from my mother when I was three) was told we were visiting Austria. I thought we were going on a holiday. We boarded a cargo ship on a round the world tour. My mother worked for a shipping company and it was a legitimate thing to do. In New Zealand, she asked how I would like to live in Australia for 5 years. I replied with a definite, "NO". She had corresponded with two men in Australia. We met one in Melbourne and then drove to Canberra to meet the other whom she eventually married. She asked if I would now like to live in Australia indefinitely. My reply was "DEFINETLY NOT!". I arrived in Australia knowing how to say 'dog' and 'cat'. I had to conform to a foreign high school routine. I was not prepared for a life as a migrant child in Australia.

Last year as the result of a bequest, I was able to return with my children to my home town, Szczecin, for seven months. I exposed 4000 frames of medium format film as material for artwork. The timing of this home-coming was significant as my daughters were about the age that I was when I left Poland with my mother. I made contact with my father, and he met his grandchildren for the first time. There were several other important consequences. Of these, what interested me was how the dislocation (a short period of time for my children) affected each of us so differently. This current work is an emotional response to my return; to reflections on childhood; to memories that persist in irritating the present; to re-establishing



contact with my close relatives; to my observations of Polish lifestyle; to its urban and rural landscape; to stories people told me of war time Poland; and to my reading of a book, Smoke over Birkenau,¹ in Polish while I was there. "You need to know about this," said an aunt handing me the book, "to understand."

My use of the photographic medium is poignant and is central to the theoretical discourses of this work. My intention was to produce an installation of photographic assemblages. What fascinates me is the way ideas are brought to life by linked, still photographs. It is a topic of investigation for me. I love European Cinema. Especially the work of the Polish film maker, Krzysztof Kieslowski and his conjunctions of seemingly incidental sequences. Emotional engagement is important for me and in Poland the supply was abundant. It usually moves me to reach for the camera. The 'feel' of a situation in my daily life is more provocative of picture-taking than the 'look' of something. The initial exposure of a large quantity of film and subsequently, of hundreds of work prints, anticipated the editing and assembling processes. It is crucial to maximise my creative freedom in these latter stages by having access to a large reservoir of material.

The editing process for an exhibition reduces print numbers and distills the content. The production of final prints resolves the qualities of each photograph such as exposure, contrast, colour balance and scale. The end sequence places final print beside final print. It is at this point that new discoveries are made and new realisations emerge. Expression is given to previously latent ideas. The success of the final work depends upon the recognition of these new possibilities. They demand attention as the deadline for exhibition draws nearer, and the time available to respond to their



Untitled
(Auschwitz)
From the series
"I left Poland when I was 11 years old"
1999 - 2000
Type C prints
160 x 150 cm
(50 x 50 cm x 9)

I left Poland when I was 11 years old

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evaluation becomes progressively shorter. The work is resolved when time and options are exhausted.

I do not wish to overlook the importance of the moment of exposure. It is the impulse of intuition. Take for example the portrait of Mia on a Winter's night in December, 1998. In a park in an old part of Szczecin, Mia's gaze is averted from me and my camera. I am transparent to her as mother and photographer. The figure in the background passes, frosted over, blind to both of us. Mia's face reveals a hardening. Lips are set. Eyes resiled. The camera flash, in a moment, has created these relationships. I perceived them all at the point of exposure. However, only later, I knew why I unhesitatingly singled it out for enlargement. It speaks of an experience I faced 24 years ago - a language barrier. The forced silence.

I regard the formal and aesthetic qualities of each photograph as making a vital contribution to the work's overall appeal. In relation to the two images taken at Auschwitz, I hesitated over the colour balance. Should it be biased toward a nauseating green or a cold blue? I finally decided on it's complimentary opposite - orange. It is a vibrating colour that is in the first instant warm but deceptive. It calls out for the viewer to come and see. But it is the colour that agitates, unnerves, sickens. Here, it undermines the warm and comfortable.

It took a combination of seven images to contextualise the two images I took at Auschwitz. I did not know when I took them how they would be shown. I wanted to convey the terror, nervous energy and mental endurance necessary for day to day survival in its chambers of horror. The horror associated with the knowledge that the atrocities committed at Auschwitz were often witnessed by

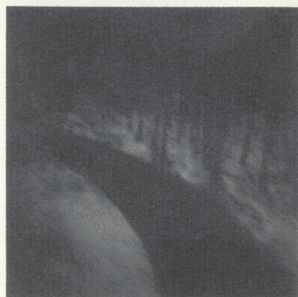


Marzena Wasikowska

Untitled 1.
(Auschwitz)
From the series
"I left Poland when I was 11 years old"
 1998 - 2000

Type C prints

160 x 150 cm
 (50 x 50 cm x 9)



I left Poland when I was 11 years old.

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young children. The anguish of long train journeys often under the cover of darkness to a destination unknown by the travellers. I wanted to reference the persistent hunger which plagued the inmates while Nazi tables overflowed with abundance. Hope and memory were the source of prisoner survival. The overtones arising from the assemblage of multiple photographs made this possible.



In photographic terms this body of work is low key. The tonal register is dark. And even when I am standing before it, facing the most colourful segments, a melancholy prevails. Memories are not necessarily dark. Happy, bright, memories, despite the inevitable fading of detail, are of course a part of every day experience. In this instance, the overhanging sadness associated with unchangeable past, has influenced my treatment of the subject.

Marguerite Duras in her novel The Lover speaks about a 'memory image'. For Duras, a memory image is the recollection of a significant event that was never photographed. In her memory image, she is fifteen and a half years old and is crossing the Mekong River on a ferry on her way back to a boarding school in Saigon.



"I think it was during this journey that the image became detached, removed from all the rest. It might have existed, a photograph might have been taken, just like any other, somewhere else, in other circumstances. But it wasn't. The subject was too slight. Who would have thought of such a thing? The photograph could only have been taken if someone could have known in advance how important it was to be in my life, that event, that crossing of the river."

There are photographs that I wish had been taken of my childhood



in Poland. Upon my return I belatedly made only a few images which approximated my memory images. They were made with the same desire as the one that drove Marguerite Duras to seek out a photograph of her son that came "closest to the one never taken of the girl on the ferry."

It is ironic to think that as a child of 11, in this entrance to my Polish apartment I had pre-visualised my future. I had hoped the telephone would soon be connected in that hallway and envisaged conversations I would have with friends and later, lovers. I remember looking at myself in that mirror, my face swollen, red after a screaming match. When I was alone in the apartment one night, a drunken man rang the door bell persuading me to let him in. Astonished, one sunny morning, to find my mothers blood stained underpants in the clothes basket on the floor. The mirror is still there. My uncle had kept it. I remember when my mother had brought it home. Now Jess stands here with me, in the shadow of the doorway to the loungeroom. This photograph was made to prevent the birth of another 'memory image'.

In literary narratives such as the short story or novel the grammatical structure sequentially reveals the content. The temporal nature of cinema determines the release of information. A single, still, visual statement / photograph makes an instant revelation. Like the concrete poem, the assembled images offer their content to the viewer in a way that falls somewhere between the literary and the cinematic.

These photographs, can function as a story board. The viewer's movement in the exhibition space creates the sequence. The temporal differences between each of the juxtaposed images create



Untitled From the series
"I left Poland when I was 11 years old" 1998 - 2000
Type C prints
60 x 254 cm

links within the narrative journey.

Blocks of images function as paragraphs of meaning. Compositional elements within the single images converse with their neighbours. It is important to introduce jarring elements into the structure of the groups to prevent a predictable pattern from developing.

The emotional nuance of the lived moment that initiates the photographic documentation must survive in the final work.

EndNotes

- i **Edwards**, Susan., "Post-Photographic Anxiety", History of Photography, Volume 22, Number1, Spring 1998
- ii **Sontag**, Susan., On Photography, Allen Lane, London, 1979
- iii **Brennan**, Anne., Exhibition Opening Speech Notes, In the Addendum.
- iv **Hirsh**, Marianne., Family Frames, Cambridge, Mass, 1997, p223
- v Original title translated from Polish reads Dymy nad Birkenau. One concentration camp survivor, writes about her and other inmates' life in Birkenau. Birkenau was a concentration camp located 2 - 7 kilometers from Auschwitz. I read this book in Poland, no bibliographic details noted.
- vi **Duras**, Marguerite, The Lover, Flamingo, Great Britain, 1985,



Marzena Wasikowska

Untitled. From the series

"I left Poland when I was 11 years old" 1998 - 2000

Type C prints

60 x 254 cm

Manga

The recording of the photographs I took in Poland took a long time and was very hard. I needed to find some way of representing how I felt and created a conceptual space for this to occur. The contemporary landscape of Manga Biele Polesie provided the perfect environment for these activities. I continued work in a variety of the landscape. I was / Wasikowska's early work in a landscape to represent the conservation landscape to show the forest from the past.



I continued to work on the landscape in the context of new images.

The results were exceptional and there were many subsequent opportunities to document her work.



The processing of the photographs I took in Poland took a long time even after my return. I needed to find some line of generating new work that provided a conceptual space for this to occur. The contemplative landscape of Monga State Forest provided the perfect environment for these activities. I submitted work to a Friends of the Mongarlowe River / Wilderness Society exhibition in Braidwood to raise funds for the conservation campaign to save the forest from logging.

Adolescents Photographs of Jess and friends

While we were in Poland, my daughter, Jess, became interested in being photographed in certain locations which both described and authenticated her travels in Europe. She would send these photographs to her friends as a complement to her letters. Upon our return, she realised the power of these mirror images of one's self. Inspired by fashion magazines, she requested I take some photographs of her with her friends while they were getting ready for a school social. These were to be strictly 'glamour' photographs. I embarked on the 'photo shoot' stirred by the prospect of new images.

The results were acceptable, and there were many subsequent opportunities to 'document' her social life.



The technical excitement for the beginning of my MA VA was the opportunity to print colour for the first time. The emotional and psychological dynamic of colour was of interest to me. I was keen to see if I could achieve the kind of colour induced nuances that I saw in Nan Goldin's and Nick Waplington's work.

In Semester 1, 1997, I undertook a technical course in colour photography over two units, learning basic printing skills and colour film properties. I experimented with many brands of colour film and paper preferring in the end Kodak stock for its excellent treatment of skin tones and less vibrant, muted colours. Kodak tungsten film exposed in daylight and colour corrected in the enlarger gave muted tones at an even lower register again.

Fuji transparency film, on the other hand, was used for its rich bias towards red. This was deliberately utilised for the indoor images of the 'Winter Garden' series.

It was in this part of my course that I learnt to print black and white negatives on to colour paper, a technique that I am using with Polish material in my final folio.

Towards the end of Semester 1, I familiarised myself with Cibachrome printing and produced a series of exhibition quality prints. This required the acquisition of new film, paper and chemistry and to think in positives for a change.

Basically, I worked according to the standard action research model. I would expose a number of rolls of film for development in a commercial lab. I would then make a proof sheet from each roll of negative film. Transparency film was immediately accessible. I

would then produce work-prints from selected negatives / transparencies and 'live' with these images for at least a few days before exposing new film. I resolved to allow thought process to develop rather than crafting the subconscious. I was also open to new possibilities in terms of colour shifts, composition, form, perspective, lens play, lighting and mixing tungsten film with daylight.

Theory Unit 1: Arguing Objects. Essay summary

I looked at how Baron Wilhelm von Gloeden (1856 - 1931) engaged aestheticism as a mask for expression of sexual desire, and classicism as a way of legitimising photography as fine art. I cross-referenced von Gloeden's practice with that of Robert Mapplethorpe's. I referred to the writings of Immanuel Kant and Oscar Wilde and the observations of Sigmund Freud.

Theory Unit 2: Points of View. Essay summary

A review of the exhibition 'Body' curated by Anthony Bond at the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

Field Trips

I undertook two four-day field trips during semester breaks to the barren environment of Lake Mungo and to the cultivated landscape surrounding Griffith, NSW. Both excursions provided preparatory experience for photographing in Poland as a traveller. It was necessary to place myself in new working contexts and to respond quickly to changing locations. The most interesting images were taken either at dusk or at night with fill-in flash.

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My MA VA has spanned three years. Much of it has been spent in an investigation of the memories of my early life and the memory-image potential of the photograph. Through the experience of returning to visit the people and places of my childhood I have reached the view that photographs reveal a constructed past. A past that is configured firstly by the photographer and secondly by the viewer in much the same way as historians write history. Feelings associated with my cultural displacement as a child have influenced the treatment of my final folio of photographs. My presentation of these images explores the narrative potential of sequencing and multi-layering of still photographic images. This work stands as an expression of remembered experiences and is a documentation for future reference, for remembrance when recalled experiences of life are not as clear and distinct as they once were.

Addenda

Anne Brennan's notes Winter Garden, Photospace, CSA

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Describe what we are seeing: sleeping children enfolded in warm red drapery; the glow of a bedside lamp lights the skin of children posturing and performing before the camera, at times it seems they are oblivious, at others they are completely conscious of it, and play deliberately to it. Interspersed between these images of enclosed, secure, warm domestic fug are nocturnal images of what seems to be an abandoned wintery garden at night. These images are of trees, ordinary trees, but unsettling in a way in which is hard to define: the lighting is part of it, but also, the way in which the rope hangs from the branches of the tree, or a branch hangs in the foreground, bleached out and while like a lightning bolt.

Want to say at the out set that these photographs are sensuous, erotic. Difficult thing to saying the context of the moral panic in the community about paedophilia. (No safe space to discuss childhood sensuality). I don't want to allow this discussion to be hijacked by an ethical debate about the representation of naked children by offering an alternative reading, which begins as I usually do in these circumstances, with an anecdote.

Mo: connection with the childhood body

Marzena's work deals with transactions between mother and child: the intimacy which allows a relationship is not unlike that of lovers. There is an erotic connection between parents and children. Initially wanted to photograph the children sleeping: a reference to memorial photographs: sleep/death; love and loss being two halves of an indivisible whole: we prefigure loss even as we love. Difficulty in controlling them: they take over the shoot, won't lie down, won't sleep, want to assume their own postures so Marzena allows them to perform.

We are looking at it as the artless way in which children essay their own sensual natures: they try things on, act out, revel in every conceivable stereotype which the adult world offers them. These photographs are extraordinarily tender, but they are made remarkable by the degree of unselfconscious trust which the children exhibit: Marzena herself is as amongst the children as she is before them or behind the camera.

What of the landscapes? Capable of a multitude of readings: perhaps their juxtapositioning is a simple contrasting of the warm secure inside with cold and alien winter outside world. Perhaps this suite of photographs is about different childish mind states: half dreaming sensuous world between sleeping and walking is shown to us alongside the alien world of sleep and dreams. Capacity of children to invent nightmares out of the everyday.

Anne Brennan - opening night speech notes.

Semester 2. 1997.

I am working to produce a body of work for the Winter Garden exhibition in Photospace - October 20 - 24

I am interested in juxtaposing photographs of the landscape taken at night and printed with a cyan-blue cast, with the photographs of my children playing on the red bed. I am dealing with an emotional temperature.

The red pictures have a warmth of, children playing, inside, where they revel in their own sensuality, of security and warmth heightened all the more by the knowledge that it is cold outside.

I am acknowledging their expressions of innocence rather than eroticizing these moments and actions.

The colour red works well with the skin tones, the connotations of warmth - sitting by the fire, good health and vigour.

This is contrasted (the cold outside) with accompanying implications of threat. The familiar by day becomes the sinister by night.

I am open to constructing images that can be the basis of initiating imaginary narratives.

I am interested in producing images which have an aesthetic visual quality of colour, tone and formal elegance; images which also produce an aesthetic response in the viewer.

This semester I intend to consolidate the technical skills that I acquired last semester - colour negative printing as well as cibachrome.

Time permitting, I want to produce a smaller body of work for *Landmarks V: Murrumbidgee on the Hay Plain*

I have not yet decided how I will approach this. Some ideas are:

the logistics of travel, the weed as flower, or a selection of paired images.

I intend to approach my work as action research.

I will be looking at the work of Balthus, Bill Hensen

Semester 1. 1998.

I propose to initiate my art production this semester with a broad ranging survey to generate new possibilities and directions as well as continuing the ones I have already taken. This strategy I intend to invoke when in Poland and I am now refining my working method. From this disparate array of subject matter, different combinations and sets of images will be compiled and evaluated for meanings and explored for unexpected visual relationships. From these juxtapositionings I expect various narratives or thought associations to emerge. I will want to trial the presentation of these experiments in a gallery space, ie a pin-up in Photospace with a view of taking to Poland, the core of a show. If this strategy proves successful, I would, while in Poland repeat the procedure of surveying a wide range of subject matter.

Different types of disparateness.

I would be looking for a formal relationships between each among the sets of a set to the extent that they could be suggestive of a severe cinematic sequence.

Some of the sets may be related in terms of time and place such that they suggest a cinematic sequence. Others may be disparate in terms of time and place (subject matter) but have strong relationships in terms of visual structure.

Others may be related in terms of mood ie tension, colour, tone, etc.

Memory is a topic I would like to explore. I will spend some time reading autobiographies and biographies.

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Exhibitions, semester1 1998

Griffith Regional Gallery, *The Cultivated Landscape*, 18 March - 5 April 1998 (won 1st prize in photography)

Michaelis School of Art Gallery, *Vital Signs*, Capetown, South Africa. May 6 - 22, 1998

Semester 2 1998

Fieldwork Plan,

I plan to be in Poland from August, 1998 to February, 1999 based

in Szczecin the city of my birth and early childhood.

Aim and anticipated outcome:

My aim is to produce a body of photographic colour prints in Poland that can be presented as:

1. An exhibition

(Depending on available space approximately 30 16x20 prints. I envisage the prints being hung in a tight linear sequence at conventional height on the wall. The feeling I want is for the space to look full from a concentrated presentation of visual information)

2. A boxed folio

3. A file of digitised images for FieldScreen communication and, time and resources permitting, possibly for a www site.

Focus of proposed study

This body of work will document my return with my children to Poland and our stay in Szczecin.

Relationship to prior experience

The academic planning for this fieldwork began last semester when I tested a method of working with my return to Poland in mind.

This involved the production of a large number of photographic prints (80 x 120 format colour negative films; 100 x 16"x20" colour prints) depicting a disparate array of subject matter. From this visual stock, different combinations and sets of images were compiled in a simulated gallery space and subsequently explored for meaning and for visual relationships.

These juxtapositionings generated various narratives and thought associations based on perceived elements of difference and elements in common, such as with time, place, characters (my chil-

dren) and various visual structural elements such as colour, tone, composition.

This proved a very successful strategy and I intend to work in a similar way in Poland.

Working methods and processes

I have a number of specific sites of particular significance in mind such as my home, school etc. I intend to focus on architectural detail and European qualities of light and landscape to engage as elements of difference with the body of photographic work already produced here. On the other hand, I anticipate that my children (specifically Jess who is of a similar age as I was when I left Poland in 1974), who will occupy these places, will constitute elements of similarity with the Australian body of work and thereby contribute to the emergence of narrative connections between the Polish and Australian series.

In a gallery, the photographs will be arranged in carefully considered sequences. But the editorial mix of location, time and character will be such as to challenge narrative expectations and thereby compel the viewer to construct contexts that, in part, draw on their own preoccupations.

I will take my complete photographic equipment with me. I will use mainly 120 -format colour film. I intend to produce proofs, working and final prints in Poland.

External approval / Specific resources

I will have access (to be re-confirmed on arrival) to photographic darkroom facilities at the Akademia Sztuk Pięknych (Poznan Academy of Fine Art) in a nearby city for printing and evaluation.

Also, I will have access to e-mail and digital image scanning facilities.

I hope to organise FieldScreen contact with my supervisor, Martyn Jolly, as discussed and agreed to with him. I have applied for a CSA Graduate Materials Award to cover transmission costs. I intend to have full FieldScreen communication after the arrival of equipment with John Reid in Poland in October.

New skills

Down-loading of digital images by e-mail.

Communication via FieldScreen.

I hope to be able to establish a Web site but this will depend on finding appropriate instruction and resources.

Semesters 1 and 2. 1999

Having just returned from Europe, I am still in the process of assessing the 4000 colour, 120 format negatives that I exposed mainly in Poland but also, Germany, France and Russia. This process will span the remaining two study units of my course - one unit in each semester in 1999.

I am working to produce a body of work for exhibition, both in Australia and in Poland, in response to my experience of re-visiting Poland with my children and the people and places of my childhood. Images will be printed at least 20x24 inch (taking in to account Nigel's comments I will also work with smaller prints) and assembled in narrative sequences which may only marginally reference the personal and emotional circumstance of their produc-

tion. It is important for the work to be psychologically evocative through strong formal photographic qualities (composition, colour, detail, veracity) and to allow for non-private and cross-cultural readings.

For the Semester 1 assessment I will print up a selection of images and consider them in terms of categories. This will strictly be work in progress with the final decisions being made at the end of Semester 2.

1962

Born in Szczecin, Poland

1974

Migrated to Australia

Educational Experience

1983

Diploma of Visual Art, Canberra School of Art

1987

BA (Visual), Canberra School of Art

1997

Commenced Master of Visual Art CSA The Australian National University

Group Exhibitions

1985

Marzena Wasikowska: Photographs

1985

Bitumen River Gallery ACT

Sexuality Show Canberra School of Art Gallery ACT

1987

Salon Coda Bitumen River Gallery ACT*State to Statement* Gallery One Leichhardt Sydney

1989

Agfa National Photographic Exhibition Albury Regional Art Centre NSW*Members Show* Canberra Contemporary Art Space ACT

1995-96

Staff Exhibitions Faculty of Environmental Design

- University of Canberra ACT
- 1997 *Disclosure* Australian Centre of Photography Sydney NSW
- Landmarks V Murrumbidgee on the Hay Plains*
Photospace Canberra School of Art ACT and Leichardt Street Gallery Hay NSW
- 1998 *International 20E foto Festival* Knokke Heisst Belgium
- Vital Signs* Michaelis University Capetown South Africa
- Secret Places* Photospace CSA ACT and Sydney College of the Arts Gallery
- Landmarks VI* Photospace CSA and Griffith Regional Gallery Griffith NSW
- 1999 *Vital Signs (Znaki Zycia)* Muzeum Stargard Szczecinski Poland
- Polish Photographers Abroad Zamek Ksiazat Pomorskich (The Castle Galleries) Szczecin Poland*
Stowarzyszenie "Wspolnota Polska" Warsaw Poland
(Touring Exhibition)
- The Josephine Ulrick Photography Prize* Tweed River Regional Art Gallery NSW
- 2000 *Season 2000* Graduate Exhibition CSA ANU
- 2000 *Overtones - from a journey to Poland* Nexus Adelaide SA
- Individual Exhibitions**
- 1997 *The Winter Garden* Photospace CSA ANU ACT
- 1998 *Marzena Wasikowska: Photographs* WSSU Szczecin Poland
- Prizes and Public Collections and Grants**
- 1985 1st Prize Photography Section
Mitchell College Union National Student Art Prize
Judge: Max Dupain
- 1990 Art Bank Australian Federal Government Collection
- 1998 New Work Grant ARTS ACT Government
- 1999 Member of the Polish Art Photographers Fellowship

The concepts and contexts informing my work are accounted for in this report under the titles by which the work was assembled as a folio or for exhibition.

The *Winter Garden* and *The Brou Lake Series 1* were exhibited. *Overtones* will be exhibited in April 2000.

The Winter Garden

Photospace, Canberra School of Art 20 - 24 October, 1997
Canberra, ACT

Australian Centre for Photography December, 1997 / January, 1998 Sydney, NSW

Two works selected in *Disclosures. Emerging Artists in Photography 1997*

Vital Signs 7 Artists from the Canberra Institute of the Arts

Michaelis Gallery, University of Cape Town 6 - 22 May, 1998
Cape Town, South Africa

The Cultivated Landscape

Griffith Regional Gallery, , 18 March - 5 April 1998

(1st prize in photography section)

Landmarks V: Murrumbidgee on the Hay Plain

Photospace Gallery, CSA and Hay, NSW

International Photo Festival Knokke-Heist,

Belgium, 1998, Jan - March

I sent 4 prints - 2 black and white and 2 colour - to Belgium for an International Photo Festival. The colour prints were taken this year and exhibited in Photospace, the black and white ones were taken in the last two years.

School of Applied Art October, 1998, Szczecin, Poland

Winter Garden exhibited with *The Brou Lake Series 1*

Muzeum w Stargardzie Szczecińskim February, 1999

Stargard Szczeciński, Poland

Complete works exhibited under the collective title:

Znaki Życia. Wystawa prac siedmiu artystów z Canberra Institute of the Arts

Zamek Zsiazat Pomorskie April, 1999,

Szczecin, Poland

Nine works exhibited; four works from *Winter Garden* and five from *The Brou Lake Series*. One work in an international travelling group

exhibition titled: *Polish Photographers Abroad*

Dom Polonii w Warszawie 20 October - 8 November, 1999

Warsaw (As above)

Polish Photographers Abroad is still to tour Germany, France, UK and USA.

The Brou Lake Series 1

School of Applied Art. October, 1998, Szczecin, Poland

Exhibited with six selected works from *The Winter Garden*

Zamek Zsiazat Pomorskich. April, 1999, Szczecin

Nine works exhibited with four works from *The Winter Garden* in international travelling group exhibition titled:

Polish Photographers Abroad

Dom Polonii w Warszawie 20 October - 8 November, 1999

Warsaw (As above)

Polish Photographers Abroad is still to tour Germany, France, UK and USA.

Overtones From a Journey to Poland

The Josephine Ulrick Photography Prize Tweed River

Regional Art Gallery NSW

Nexus Multicultural Arts Centre 30 March - 30 April, 2000

Adelaide, SA

Monga

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Cheetham, Celia., "Differing Views On Bill Henson", Artwrite, 1996, Issue 10,

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